

Remarks by Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
Columbus Citizens Foundation Gala
Waldorf-Astoria Hotel
New York, New York
Saturday, October 11, 2008

Thank you, Larry, for that introduction.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be here, and I am particularly pleased to see my good friend, Admiral Ed Giambastiani serving as Grand Marshall for these Columbus Day celebrations.

It is always great to come home to New York, and it is an even greater treat to be here on a weekend during which we are celebrating both Columbus Day and the 100th anniversary of Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet.

His idea of sending 16 battleships around the world ended up setting so many precedents that Theodore Roosevelt can rightly be considered one of the fathers of the modern Navy.

Embracing George Washington's principle of peace through strength, testing and evaluating our equipment on extended deployments, and engaging diplomatically were all fundamental elements of the Great White Fleet world tour, and they came to define how our Navy would operate during the course of the 20th century.

Today we continue to carry out these missions and many others as well.

Our Nation faces a broad spectrum of challenges, and it relies on a strong Navy to meet them in missions that take us worldwide, everyday.

To take just one day in the Navy, last month, as an example, it is astonishing to consider what the 450,000 Sailors in our Navy managed to accomplish.

Over 3,000 Sailors on carrier RONALD REAGAN—plus an additional 2500 more on the embarked air wing—were engaged in operations in support of Coalition forces on the ground in Afghanistan.

Several time zones away, the 6,000 Sailors on the carrier GEORGE WASHINGTON were underway in the Pacific and en route to her new home port in Yokosuka, Japan.

Here at home, 1,000 Sailors and 2,000 Marines on the amphibious ship NASSAU

were operating off the coast of Galveston, Texas and providing emergency relief to victims of Hurricane Ike.

A few hundred miles away, the 3,000 Sailors and Marines onboard the amphibious ship KEARSARGE departed Haiti for Guantanamo Bay for resupply after having delivered more than 1000 metric tons of relief supplies to communities devastated by hurricanes.

In addition to the operations performed by Sailors assigned to units at sea, the Navy was also performing heroically in a variety of missions ashore.

15,000 Sailors were on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan—from Seabees to corpsmen to electronic warfare specialists to masters-at-arms performing maritime security on oil platforms in the Northern Arabian Gulf.

From these examples among many that could be cited, one quickly realizes the extent to which our Navy is actively engaged around the world.

Our Sailors executed critical operations in two war zones, deterred aggression and maintained the peace around the world, ensured maritime security in critical areas, defended the system of global commerce, and provided humanitarian assistance to thousands of people in distress.

And all that was done on just one average day in the U.S. Navy!

Their service is marked by sacrifice, commitment, and the highest standards of professionalism.

Keep in mind that they are all volunteers, and over half of them signed up to join the Navy after 9/11—understanding fully the risks of serving during a time of war.

That is the story of today's U.S. Navy.

Unfortunately, the range of our operations and the impact of the U.S. Navy around the world are not always known to people outside the military, but I know that our friends from the Italian Navy here tonight already have a keen appreciation for what we do.

Our engagement with Italy dates back 100 years with our humanitarian assistance to the victims of the earthquake at Messina.

That engagement continues today with the Italian government and the people of Naples, who host the U.S. 6th Fleet and their families.

We consider the U.S.-Italian relationship indispensable to our security.

Mi piacerebbe ringraziare tutti chi rappresentano la Marina italiana questa sera per tutto il vostro sostegno per continuare il rapporto stretto fra le nostre marine militari.

I would like to thank all those representing the Italian Navy this evening for all your support for continuing the close relationship between our Navies.

I would also like to thank the city of New York for your wonderful welcome, and for the close relationship between the world's greatest city and the U.S. Navy.

I can assure you that Fleet Week here is always a memorable highlight of any Sailor's career.

Lastly, I wish to thank the Columbus Citizens' Foundation for all your support for our Sailors and Marines.

You help make serving in the Navy and Marine Corps an exciting and worthwhile endeavor, and I am very pleased to see that you are using this event to recognize some of the great Sailors and Marines and their outstanding achievements.

Thank you.